

# Formosans Know What They Want

by LI THIAN-HOK

It is now the vogue to say that Chiang Kai-shek's Government has turned over a new leaf, and that it has accomplished miracles on Formosa. Voluminous statistics are poured forth by the Nationalist Government in support of its claims of progress in production, agrarian reform, local autonomy, education and so forth. Outsiders have been mightily interested. Professor Fairbank hopefully states in *The New Republic* of October 13, 1958, that this new development may be a useful corrective to the stereotype image of Nationalist corruption. Lord Lindsay tells us (*NR*, Oct. 6) that rice production reached 1.8 million tons in 1957 compared with 1.4 million tons in 1938. These are eminent scholars; yet is theirs the last word?

Lord Lindsay, for example, fails to mention that the increase in rice production was achieved at the sacrifice of other crops, notably sugar cane; and that population increased on Formosa in that period from 5.5 million to 10 million, so that per capita rice production actually has declined! While more than 50 percent of the Formosan rice crop was exported in 1940, by 1955 that figure dropped to 10.6 percent; and with the steady increase in population (which Chiang's regime eyes with approval as a source of manpower) Formosa may well be out of the rice export market in two to three years. Production of sugar, another export crop, had reached 1.4 million tons in 1938-39; it was down to .77 million tons in 1955-56. Industrial production similarly lags behind population growth, so that the per capita production index is lower, not higher, than it was during the period of Japanese rule of Formosa prior to World War II.

We must also scrutinize more closely the much applauded agrarian reforms of the Nationalists. In 1949, Governor Chen Cheng issued an order limiting maximum land rent to 37.5 percent of the value of the main crops grown on the land. This represented an over-all reduction of 12.5 percent from previous rent rates. However, by compelling farmers to sell their "surplus" rice at low fixed prices in exchange for fertilizers supplied by ECA, the Nationalist Government deprived peasants of all they had supposedly gained from the rent reduction.

This may be illustrated by taking the experience of an average tenant farmer. In 1949, he produced 1.32 tons of rice, or the equivalent of \$224 at the market price of \$170 per ton. His gain from rent reduction was 12.5 percent of the \$224, or \$28. Now the government agency, which monopolized fertilizer distribution, would demand 1.5 tons of rice in exchange for one ton of fertilizer whereas .4 ton of rice should have been adequate. (Market price of fertilizer was then \$70 per ton.) For each ton of fertilizer it provided, the government made in profit 1.1 tons of rice, or \$187. Since the average farmer utilized 186 kg of fertilizer, his loss from exchange was 18.6 percent of \$187, or approximately \$35. Thus, his gain from rent reduction was less than the amount the government took away from him with its device of fertilizer exchange program.

The land redistribution program which was started in 1953 likewise deserves a skeptical closer look. The larger landholder was required to sell to the Nationalist Government all of his land in excess of three hectares of medium-grade paddy field. He was compensated at the price of 2.5 times the value of the annual main crop. Seventy percent of the government purchase price was paid him in commodity bonds to be redeemed in rice and sweet potatoes in 20 installments over ten years; and 30 percent in the form of stocks issued by four government-owned enterprises. But from the moment it was issued the value of the stock began to fall spectacularly!

In exchange for the commodity bonds, the farmer whose land had been taken over could either get rice or cash. But the government would offer only the poorest grade of old rice, which is hardly edible; the alternative is to get the equivalent value in cash, not at the market price, but at a lower rate fixed by the government. The upshot is that the landowner was, and is, inadequately and unfairly compensated.

The government then resold the land to tenant farmers, but demanded good-quality rice in payment, rather than cash. Thus by levying high-grade rice from tenant farmers and selling it at market price, while offering poor-grade rice or its

equivalent at a lower fixed price as compensation, the Nationalist Government has found in the land reform another source of profit. Furthermore, simultaneously with the launching of the land reform program, all sorts of taxes were raised on the ground that the farmers could now afford heavier levies. Most of them are presently in debt, and trying desperately to raise enough rice to pay for the increased taxes, the land and the fertilizer.

It is claimed that there has been great expansion in secondary schools and universities. But a good deal of expansion resulted, not from net increase in the number of students or facilities, but from renaming pre-existing schools. The increased number of junior high schools in the counties is to be expected in view of the larger population. But facilities are poor and the quality of teachers is extremely low. At the college level, competition for admission is keen, the ratio of applicants to be admitted often exceeding 10 to 1. The Formosans resent the fact that overseas Chinese students, who can enter colleges without entrance examination, are unfairly cutting down their already limited opportunity. As for elementary school education, it was universal under the Japanese.

It is said, too, that progress has been made in local government, as if the mechanical election of local councils, mayors and the Provincial Assembly signifies democratic participation in government by the people. It does not. In the first place, there is a peculiar dual government in the "province" of Formosa—a Central Government and a Provincial Government. The former has deprived the latter of practically all government functions but that of collecting taxes. Though Formosans dominate the "legislative" organs at the provincial level and below, they have no power to make decisions of any sort. Members of these bodies can only ask immaterial questions, or run small errands for their constituencies. They cannot criticize, they cannot legislate. The Central Government, which makes all laws and policies and executes them, is under the exclusive control of the Chinese refugees. What we have in Formosa today, therefore, is Chinese colonialism, if we define colonialism as the subjugation of one people by another.

Second, elections in Formosa are invariably rigged. The Nationalist Party is financed directly by

the government treasury, which is a great advantage in election campaigns. Chiang's party controls the press and the radio. It monopolizes the supervision of balloting and the counting of the votes. (This practice is called a "safety device" in popular vernacular.) It can and has used the police to harass the campaigning of non-party candidates. A successful, non-party candidate for mayor finds his Nationalist subordinates uncooperative and provincial aid to his city curtailed or denied. In one instance at least a forged charge of bribery was used to put a non-party mayor-elect in jail.

Finally, as all three participants in *The New Republic's* discussion on Formosa's future—Messrs. Lindsay, Fairbank and Warner—seem to agree, there is strict police control and lack of civil liberties on Formosa today. As Professor Fairbank so aptly points out, Chiang Kai-shek's anti-Communism is a personal thing, it does not imply defense of individual freedom or a rule of law. The necessary preconditions for evolving a new democratic order out of the present autocracy simply do not exist.

As Lord Lindsay has noted, many Formosans do join the Nationalist Party nowadays. But why? Candidates for office join since it is virtually impossible to get elected otherwise. Many join to get a job or have a better chance for promotion. Almost all college graduates join because they have little alternative. All male college graduates are required to take two years' military training, a large part of which is devoted to the study of Three People's Principles, the teachings of Chiang Kai-shek, etc. (brainwashing, Nationalist style). During this period all are urged to join the party. Those who hedge or refuse are ordered out of their beds several times during a night for questionings by the Political Officers. This goes on until the victims break down and yield. Most Formosan Party members are actually anti-Nationalist in sentiment.

To summarize there has been considerable economic improvement on Formosa—thanks to American aid—since the 1945-49 period, when the economy was on the verge of collapse due to corruption, systematic plunder and a runaway inflation. Nevertheless, largely because of heavy military expenditures and population growth, the standard of living is still lower than it was during

Japanese days. Does this mean Formosans long for the return of the Japanese? Not at all. Although there was material well-being under the Japanese, the Formosans were against their rulers because of social discrimination and the lack of civil and political liberties. In these latter aspects, the Nationalist regime is no different from the Japanese; the situation is worse in that there is not even legal protection for the ordinary citizens in Formosa today.

Why then, it may be asked, do the nine million Formosans seem to be either indifferent or ambivalent toward the Nationalist regime? The reason is simple: fear. Ultimately, Nationalist control of the island is based on its highly institutionalized use of terror. All Formosans, to a larger or lesser degree, have cause to be afraid. They witnessed a large-scale massacre in March, 1947; they know that there are still thousands of political prisoners on Green Island (a penal colony off the southeastern coast of Formosa) and in the over-crowded penitentiaries, most of them young university students. Practically every Formosan has a friend or relative who has been executed for political offense. The intellectuals, who should be the most articulate, are perhaps the most inhibited, because as a group they have been subjected to the severest pressures.

Mutual suspicion effectively cuts off candid exchange of opinions. When asked their opinion of the Nationalist regime or the future of Formosa, most Formosans are likely to hedge or use euphemism—for example, that they want to see Formosa revert to its provincial status, an oblique attack on Chiang's localized super-government. To express a desire for independence is, of course, tantamount to treason and punishable as such. This fact explains the difficulties correspondent Denis Warner (*NR*, Nov. 3) seems to have encountered in ascertaining the wishes of the Formosans, but it does not support his conclusion that they do not know what they want.

Were they given a chance to express their true feelings without danger to life or liberty, a great majority of Formosans would favor independence under a genuinely democratic government of their

own. There is no doubt that the idea of independence appeals to all of them, though many want a transitional UN trusteeship as a preliminary step toward independence. Nor is this desire for independence simply a reaction to Nationalist policies and practices. The significance of the February revolution of 1947 lies in the self-discovery of the Formosan nationality, the development of which goes back to the 17th Century. Half a century of Japanese rule contributed further to the shaping of this sense of national identity by inculcating in Formosans respect for the rule of law and appreciation of scientific methods and efficiency, sanitation and the value of education. After more than three centuries of geographic isolation and common historical experiences, it is not strange that we find a distinct Formosan culture and a strong, if repressed, sense of national consciousness.

The undercurrent of discontent is highly unsettling in view of the growing power potential of Formosans in business, government, and the armed forces. This is especially true now that Chiang's renunciation of the use of force to reconquer the mainland has sown the seeds of doubt as to the very *raison d'etre* of his regime—doubts which may well mark the beginning of the end for the Nationalists. Since there is no legitimate channel for the expression of political dissent, no outlet for frustrated aggression, violent internal convulsion appears inevitable. The question is when and how it will erupt.

The aspiration for self-determination on the part of the nine million Formosans offers the best chance for not just a non-Communist but a democratic, Formosa. The energy and will to defend the island against Communist aggression and subversion, the desire to build up a free society, are there. But will there be sufficient wisdom in the US and the free world to channel this aspiration to a constructive purpose before it is too late?

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## Chinese Rule on Formosa

SIRS:

RESORTING to half-truths and outright falsehoods, Li Thian-hok, author of "Formosans Know What They Want" in the November 24 issue of *The New Republic*, has created a one-sided and therefore distorted picture of Formosa.

Mr. Li claimed that more than 50 percent of the Formosan rice crop was exported in 1940 (during Japanese occupation) and that the figure had dropped to 10.6 percent by 1955. For some reason, he did not see fit to mention that during the Japanese occupation, much of the rice crop was earmarked for export to Japan and that the diet of the Formosan-born Chinese was largely supplemented by sweet potatoes.

Impartial observers are unanimously agreed that the farmers in Formosa today enjoy a much higher standard of living than before and that, as a result of the enforcement of the land reform program begun in 1949, their income has increased by 30 percent.

Mr. Li deplored the fact that Lord Lindsay failed to mention that the increase in rice production was achieved at the sacrifice of other crops, notably sugar cane, but sugar production is largely limited by the export quota set by the International Sugar Council of which the Republic of China is a member.

With bland disregard for statistics, Mr. Li pointed out that per capita industrial production is lower than it was during the Japanese occupation. The simple fact is that while the population has doubled between 1938 and 1958, power production is now 3.74 times and cement production 4.6 times the 1938 figure. The industrial production index from 1948 to 1958 has increased three times (including mining, building, electrical appliances, etc.). The textile industry, practically non-existent in 1938, now, employs 33,000 workers and turns out textile products valued at US \$110 million annually.

Turning to the field of education, Mr. Li said that at the college level, competition for admission is keen and that the opportunity of Formosans for

higher education is limited. The shortage of institutions of higher learning is something which the government deeply deplores and is doing its best to remedy. That there is no discrimination whatever against native-born Chinese is borne out by a few pertinent figures. Of the 1,774 students enrolled in the five institutions of higher learning during the Japanese occupation, 1,419 were Japanese nationals while only 355, or 25 percent, were Formosans. Today, more than 60 percent of the students in the colleges and universities are native-born.

The view was also expressed by Mr. Li that the election of local councils, magistrates and mayors and the provincial assembly did not signify democratic participation in the government by the people. I wonder if Mr. Li knows that more than 80 percent of the eligible voters in Formosa went to the polls in most of the elections. Surely, he must be aware of the fact that in 1945, the last year of Japanese rule, among 84,559 public functionaries under the jurisdiction of the Japanese Governor-General, only one native-born Chinese, a university professor, held a post equivalent to the present "selected appointment" rank and that, by the end of 1954, among 111,633 public functionaries in the provincial government, 72,415, or 64 percent, were native-born. The figure is even higher today.

Lastly, Mr. Li aired the grievance that the "Formosans" had no opportunity to express their views. It is a pity that Mr. Li does not read newspapers and periodicals published in Formosa. If he did, he would be surprised to find the amount of criticism against the government in such publications. Furthermore, any person in Formosa is entirely free to talk to visitors from abroad. Politically and economically, it is generally agreed that Formosa is one of the most stable areas in the Far East today. I would advise Mr. Li, who has shown so much concern over the welfare of the people there, to visit Formosa and get his facts and figures straight.

F. S. CHU

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Chinese Embassy*

## ... A Formosan Disagrees

I HAVE LIVED on Formosa under both Japanese and Chinese Nationalist rule, and I do scan papers and magazines from Formosa. And what do I find? In Taipei alone, 31 business firms went bankrupt between January and May, and 327 ceased operation. Tax delinquency reached more than 2.3 million cases. The economic crisis got so bad that on July 19 the Executive Yuan forbade creditors to demand payment of principals. Unemployment is on the increase, and suicides fill news columns. To mitigate social unrest Chiang Kai-shek's propaganda machine blares out the hollow promise of the reconquest of China!

It is not hard to lie with statistics, as Mr. Chu's comments demonstrate. By taking 1948 as his base year, a year in which the Formosan economy came virtually to a halt due to systematic "squeeze," he obtains a three-fold increase in production for mining, etc., in 1958. But this comparison does not refute my point, i.e. over-all per capita industrial production is lower than it was during the Japanese days. It only goes to show how far the corrupt Chinese regime succeeded in wrecking the island's economy immediately after its take-over. Absolute growth in production in sectors such as textile and power has not been sufficient to compensate for population growth and the marked decline of sugar production, which is still the largest single industry.

Mr. Chu conveniently ignores the fact that some 75,000 Formosans went to college in Japan prior to World War II. Today, about 20 to 30 Formosan college graduates are allowed to come to the US annually. A handful go to Japan. High school graduates are not permitted to go abroad, presumably because it is dangerous to expose susceptible youthful minds to alien influences.

Nowhere does Mr. Chu deny my charges that elections are rigged. By "democratic participation in government" I meant much more than the number of voters who went to the polls. In the Soviet Union, 99 percent of voters vote. Does that make it a democracy? The number of Formosan employees in the Provincial government is irrelevant, since they are in lower administrative posts and since the Provincial government is completely subservient to

Chiang's Central government. As for criticism of the government, a shrewd dictatorship invariably permits some ventilation of grievances of a non-political and non-organized character. The kind of criticisms that appear in Formosa seems to me minor and trivial.

But to dwell on the misgovernment of the Nationalists is to miss the central point of my article, that the Chinese refugees do not have the right to rule the nine million real Formosans, who are the only rightful owners of the island, and hence should be given a chance to determine their own destiny through a UN-supervised plebiscite. If the Nationalist regime is confident of the support of the Formosans, why should it reject such a proposal?

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